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DEP RECEIVES EPA APPROVAL FOR OVERSIGHT OF FEDERAL WETLANDS PROGRAM

~Florida becomes first state in more than two decades to assume delegation of this program, thirds state in the nation to be granted this authority~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - Today, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced that after many years of thoughtful deliberation and preparation, EPA has granted the state assumption of the 404 program (the federal permitting program to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into wetlands and other waters of the United States). In 2018 the Florida Legislature passed a bill that authorized Florida to kickstart the state assumption process. After a stringent federal and public review period coupled with thorough internal preparation, DEP has been approved to adopt the federal 404 program and enhance the protection of Florida's wetlands.

"Florida continues to be a pioneer of environmental protection. This is a historic moment for our agency and our state," **said DEP Secretary Noah Valenstein**. "We appreciate EPA's stringent, public review and approval of DEP's assumption of this program. Our waters and wetlands are critical to our economy and way of life in Florida. As such, it is important for the state to be in charge and take the lead in their protection. We are pleased that with the assumption, Florida scientists and permittees will now be accountable for state and federal wetlands permits. DEP staff know the state's resources best and have the expertise to ensure their protection."

State assumption harnesses the local expertise of DEP's more than 200 environmental experts to further protect Florida's diverse and unique natural resources. These capable team members are already responsible for managing Environmental Resource Permitting (ERP) standards and will bring the same level of dedication to implementing the State 404 program.

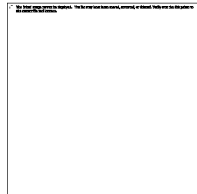
"Our staff possesses the technical expertise necessary to run the 404 program effectively, offering increased consistency and efficiency to our stakeholders and customers, and increased protections for Florida's environment," **said Deputy Secretary of Regulatory Programs John Truitt** DRAFT. "None of these efforts were undertaken in a vacuum – we have weighed public and internal feedback and have worked closely with the EPA and our stakeholders to get us to this point. It has been a team effort from the start."

So many of Florida's restoration efforts, such as Everglades restoration, have been delayed by the federal permitting program. Florida is known for overseeing the largest wetland restoration project in the world, as well as many other environmental projects. Assumption of this program will allow DEP to harness state resources to more quickly permit these key projects.

STAKEHOLDER QUOTES

Not only will state 404 assumption localize and strengthen DEP's environmental protection efforts, it will streamline permitting procedures and eliminate the duplicative reviews that halt progress on both public works and environmental projects. The majority of review requirements overlap between programs and integrating these processes at the state level will provide greater certainty to the regulated community and conserve the time and resources of both applicant and regulator.

“Florida’s environment, our waterways and our wetlands are what make the state so unique. DEP and our partners have worked diligently to develop science-based solutions to key environmental issues, and it’s crucial that these solutions are implemented in a timely and efficient fashion,” **said Chief Science Officer Dr. Tom Frazer DRAFT.** “The State 404 program will ensure the prioritization of critical environmental infrastructure projects and guarantee that local environmental experts with a vested interest in and intimate knowledge of Florida’s natural resources are at the helm.”



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